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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 006726

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/18/2016
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: MAKHMOUR: PUSHING TOWARD CLOSURE

REF: A. ANKARA 6614
[1](#)B. GENEVA 2912

Classified By: DCM Nancy McEldowney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Turkey is concerned that the Makhmour camp will remain open after some refugees repatriate to Turkey, or that non-returnees will simply be moved en masse to another camp in northern Iraq. UNHCR is struggling with how to persuade the Kurdish Iraqi authorities to resettle non-returnees in the dispersed fashion the GOT is demanding. MFA has requested of UNHCR some further changes to the Tripartite (Turkey-Iraq-UNHCR) Agreement on Makhmour; the two sides will reconvene soon. The GOT still seems hesitant to meet immediately with the Iraqis to conclude the agreement. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) In a private Dec. 19 meeting, DCM urged MFA Director General (S/CT-equivalent) Hayati Guven to conclude as soon as possible the draft Turkey-Iraq-UNHCR Tripartite Agreement (T.A.) to achieve durable solutions for the residents of Makhmour refugee camp in northern Iraq. Guven would not commit to a date for completing the agreement, but added that he was certain the Turkish parliament would eventually approve the deal.

[1](#)3. (C) Together with UNHCR representatives, we also met with Guven Dec. 18 to discuss the text of the T.A. Guven reported that the Turkish General Staff told him that it had learned that the UNHCR was planning to create another refugee camp elsewhere in Iraqi Kurdistan for those Makhmour residents who choose not to return to Turkey. The camp, TGS claimed, would be located at Bradosd in the Hakurk region, near the Iran-Iraq border. (This would place the camp firmly in PKK territory.) The UNHCR-Turkey rep, Ana Liria-Franch, firmly denied any such plan. As a matter of policy, UNHCR always opposes opening refugee camps: its job is to seek durable solutions, and it only uses camps as a last resort if compelled to do so by local authorities or circumstances.

[1](#)4. (C) Guven replied that he hoped this was the case, as Turkey firmly opposed any plan that envisioned refugees remaining at Makhmour or being moved to another camp (or to Kirkuk or Mosul, he added). If any of these options were in the cards, he emphasized, there was no need to continue

negotiations on a T.A. Both Liria-French and we agreed to check into these reports.

15. (C) Liria-French noted, however, that it has been hard to persuade the Iraqis, especially the KRG, to close Makhmour and resettle into northern Iraq those refugees who do not return to Turkey. UNHCR assesses that Makhmour is no longer really a camp: it is a village. Many residents are self-supporting, thus UNHCR's financial support has fallen over the years. It may prove difficult to persuade people to return to Turkey. Guven rejoined that it is not UNHCR's job to persuade refugees to return to Turkey, only to provide accurate information so they can pick the best option. We told Guven that Turkey needs to discuss the local integration issue directly with the GOI.

16. (C) Turning to the T.A. text itself, Guven noted that he had said during Nov. 15 discussions with UNHCR in Geneva (ref b) that Turkey would request some changes to the text. He then requested about 10 relatively minor alterations to the draft, most of which are technical in nature. He implied that a number of these changes were insisted upon by the TGS. Liria-French undertook to discuss these proposals with Geneva, and to reconvene as soon as possible.

17. (C) During the discussion, both Liria-French and we suggested to Guven that this project will be more likely to succeed if Turkey were able to attract as many refugees as possible to return. Guven responded that while the GOT cares about its citizens, it will not offer any more incentives than are offered already in the T.A. draft text. He noted that the Turkish parliament will have to approve the T.A.,

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and expressed concern that the agreement as is may have a hard time getting through -- though he assured us it would happen.

18. (C) Liria-French informed Guven that Iraqi MFA Undersecretary Hamoud had responded to UN High Commissioner Guterres' June 1 letter to President Talabani requesting the GOI to provide security to restore the humanitarian nature of the camp so that UNHCR can effect durable solutions. Guven was disappointed that the response was not from Talabani and did not discuss the issue of integration into northern Iraq, but endeavored to inform his higher authorities that Iraq had responded to Guterres' letter. We urged him to agree to talks with the GOI on the T.A. Guven was non-committal, noting that Makhmour was not the GOT's top counter-PKK priority.

19. (C) Comment: It appears that the GOT's position on the Makhmour camp remains unchanged. Its highest priority is closing the camp. GOT officials have presumably assessed that the population is alienated from Turkey, sympathetic to the PKK, and not inclined to return: Thus the government's emphasis on integrating non-returnees in northern Iraq in a dispersed fashion. We will continue to press the GOT to discuss this issue directly with the Iraqis ASAP. End comment.

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